ROLE and SCOPE of the REGIONAL PLAN

EDMONTON METROPOLITAN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

BACKGROUND PAPER

ROLE AND SCOPE OF THE REGIONAL PLAN

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose

This background paper is prepared in response to questions raised and concerns expressed by some municipal staff at the November 28, 1991 Administrative Advisory Committee meeting. It addresses the issues of: what regional planning is in practice; the relationship of the Commission's Vision to the review of the Regional Plan; some approaches to implementing regional planning; and staff conclusions as to what the Regional Plan needs in order to play a more meaningful and effective role.

2. Content

As background, Part II of the report briefly traces the evolution of regional planning in the Edmonton Region, beginning with the McNally Royal Commission on metropolitan development. A more detailed discussion of that historical background is included in the Appendix for those who wish to gain a better appreciation of the evolution of planning in this Region.

Part III summarizes the main observations from the audit of the Regional Plan, identifying general weaknesses with the plan which should be addressed as part of the review.

Part IV describes the framework for reviewing the plan and refers to the pertinent legislation, key aspects of the Alberta Planning Board Guidelines and "Framework" documents[1], the Commission's long term vision of the Region, and some important features of the current political and economic environments, in which regional planning operates.

Part V describes six approaches to implementing regional planning and Part VI sets out several conclusions which represent the main focus for conducting the review of the Regional Plan.

II. THE EVOLUTION OF REGIONAL PLANNING

1. The McNally Royal Commission

The McNally Royal Commission released its comprehensive report on the metropolitan development of Calgary and Edmonton in 1956. The Royal Commission was directed to inquire into the administration and financing of

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[1]Two documents:

1982 (a) Revised Guidelines for Regional Plan Preparation and Review.
1982 (b) Framework for the Application of Regional Plan Guidelines.

school and municipal services in and around Calgary and Edmonton and to recommend on the boundaries and form of local government which would most adequately and equitably provide for those services.

In its report, the Commission produced about eighty-five recommendations, including a map showing the recommended boundary for each of Calgary and Edmonton. The major recommendations of interest to the EMRPC included:

- that membership of area municipalities on the planning commission be mandatory;
- that the planning commission be directed to prepare a 'district general plan' for the area;
- that the province should consult with the City and planning commission in highway route planning and control of development along highways;
- that the cities should pursue a compact development pattern from the centre outwards for the sake of economical provision of utilities and other physical services; and
- that the towns of Jasper Place and Beverly be amalgamated with Edmonton and that Edmonton's boundary be enlarged on all sides, including the annexation of the industrial area and the Campbelltown Townsite (now Sherwood Park), both in Strathcona.

Over the years, many of the McNally Commission recommendations have been implemented. However, of great consequence to the development pattern and governance of the region is the fact that no decision was made to centralize major urban growth and major industrial areas in the central city. Thus, two fundamental principles upon which the recommendations were based were not acted upon, namely the equalization of the property tax base, and reducing the multiplicity of local governing bodies. These issues continue to be of importance in the region today.

2. The Edmonton Regional Plan - Metropolitan Part (1958-1984)

The Edmonton Regional Plan - Metropolitan Part, originally adopted in 1958, covered an area not much larger in size than the present City of Edmonton. The plan consisted primarily of a detailed land use classification map and accompanying regulations setting out permitted and conditional uses, parcel sizes and so on, for a number of land uses, the major ones being general urban, general urban reserve, general industrial, general industrial reserve, metropolitan recreation, country residential (2 classes) and agriculture. In keeping with the control-oriented nature of the Plan, uses not specified in the regulations required an amendment to the Plan, and this was done on several hundred occasions between 1958 and 1984.

3. Preparing a New Regional Plan (1977 to 1984)

In 1977, a new Planning Act was introduced which required municipalities above specific population limits to adopt a General Municipal Plan and a Land Use By-law. In the meantime, the Regional Planning Commission had embarked on a comprehensive process of preparing a regional plan for the entire Planning Region. Part of this process included the Edmonton Region Growth Studies, a major and thorough investigation of urban growth and settlement processes, the intent of which was to develop the urban settlement policy component of the Regional Plan. The growth study was concluded in 1978, with many compromises having been made with respect to a strategy for the Region.

Although a comprehensive draft regional plan was released in 1979, both this plan and the Edmonton Region Growth Studies were caught in the midst of a major annexation application filed by the City of Edmonton. The application proposed to annex both developed and undeveloped tracts of land (including St. Albert and Sherwood Park) to Edmonton.

The highly controversial, and in some respects unpopular, decision of the Alberta Cabinet on Edmonton's proposal included the following provisions:

- Edmonton's boundary would be significantly enlarged, ensuring the City of a long term land supply;

- St. Albert and Sherwood Park would continue to exist, the latter continuing under the jurisdiction of the County of Strathcona, but both urban communities had population limits set at 70,000;

- the regional planning boundary was reduced substantially, to focus on the metropolitan area, and Edmonton's representation on the new Commission (the EMRPC) was increased to 1/3. The Cabinet also put forward a number of growth management principles (including maintaining 75% of the Region's population in Edmonton) for the EMRPC to incorporate into its regional plan; and

- the intent of passing legislation to provide for regional authorities for water, sewer and solid waste services was introduced.

The Cabinet decision and associated political sensitivity (both provincial and municipal) to growth related issues created a difficult environment in which to seek agreement on a regional plan. Moreover, under the new legislation, many municipalities had completed their own General Municipal Plans and were reluctant to support any provisions of the Regional Plan which might have been contrary to their own plans.

During this new era of plan development, an important function of the APB was to advise RPCs on the preparation of their regional plans, particularly with respect to provincial policy and meeting the requirements of the Planning Act. Before coming into effect, the regional plan must be adopted by the Commission, approved by the Board and ratified by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. In 1980, to facilitate the approval processes and assist in preparing regional plans, the APB prepared a set of guidelines. These were revised in 1982 and clearly reflected the basic provincial philosophy that "regional plans are intended to serve as general policy documents dealing with issues truly regional in their significance and relying primarily upon the exercise of municipal planning prerogatives for their implementation" (APB, 1982a: Minister's Letter of Transmittal).

According to the "Framework" document, the proper means of dealing with the growth and change elements in the region was for the plan to establish a policy framework encouraging growth to broad classes of location. It was "not considered acceptable for a regional plan to allocate growth to specified locations, in a detailed fashion, through a regulatory approach" (APB, 1982b: 4). The regional plan was to give guidance to municipalities on planning measures which would give effect to the growth management policies. Maps in the regional plan were to be used only as a guiding tool, assisting the municipalities in developing their plans and not as a land use control mechanism. No explanation was forthcoming as to how the Commission was to ensure the implementation of the 75:25 principle, following this approach.

After a long and arduous "negotiation" process, the Commission followed the directives of the APB in preparing its Regional Plan. A major shift in provincial philosophy between 1979 and 1982, but one not reflected in any changes to the statutes, led finally to the ratification of a very general, advisory and non-prescriptive regional plan.

4. The Current (1984) Regional Plan

The 1984 Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan is a general policy plan accompanied by a Policy Reference Map. As a basis for the policies, the plan contains eight goal statements and a growth management framework. The goals address the four broad areas of regional growth management, resource management, natural environment and transportation and utilities. The basic principles of the growth management framework of the plan emerged from the Alberta Cabinet decision respecting the major Edmonton annexation proposal referred to earlier. The Commission was directed to incorporate those principles into the regional plan.

The key features of the goals and framework of the Plan include:

- a land use and development pattern which focuses regional growth (i.e. population growth) on the City of Edmonton;

- avoidance of dispersed patterns of settlement with lesser amounts of (population) growth to be accommodated in other existing urban communities;

- conservation of better agricultural land and protection of environmentally sensitive areas;

- transportation and utility services which reinforce the city-centred region concept.

In addition, the plan goals contain references to reinforcing "regional and community identity", availability of "adequate and affordable housing...in well planned communities", all municipalities sharing in "the economic growth of the region", and "transportation and utility services which are safe, convenient, efficient and environmentally compatible."

Regional Plan policy is largely advisory and, where mandatory, tends to be of the sort that directs municipalities to undertake some action through their statutory plans or by-laws, with few or no standards set for compliance. Often, this means that a regional plan policy is simply paraphrased in a local plan, without the intended refinement, detailing, or setting of criteria, etc. Apart from the Commission's role as Subdivision Approving Authority and its influence as planning advisors to some municipalities, the main attempt at regional plan implementation has been through the review of local plans and by-laws for conformity with the provisions of Regional Plan. This has been a rather tedious process, sometimes time consuming, and confrontational where there are differences of opinion as to whether a local plan does or does not conform.

III. WORKING WITH THE CURRENT REGIONAL PLAN

During the summer of 1990, interviews were conducted with the municipalities and the Commission's own planners to assess their experiences in working with the Regional Plan: how much it was used; its strengths and weaknesses; what should be re-examined; and so on. A number of weaknesses were revealed through that process.

First, the co-ordination of many aspects of growth in the Region is lacking, both horizontally (as between neighbouring municipalities) and vertically (as between municipal, regional and provincial levels of decision-making). Land use plans are not related to the need for roadway improvements; the decision to make regional services available to rural areas does not take into account the long term impacts on the type and density of land use, or the pressures for conversion of land from agricultural use; areas developed to the full capacity of existing services will likely be granted costly extensions to infrastructure while excess servicing capacity may remain in other areas.

Second, the Regional Plan is a very advisory document, and many of its policies advise municipalities on which issues should be addressed in local plans and by-laws. However, this guidance is very general, and the regional plan tends to be weak in setting out the position or perspective of the Commission on vital regional issues.

Third, the regional plan has been weakened by its advisory nature and the general lack of implementation powers at the regional level. The expectation (on the part of the APB and the Minister) that regional policy will be implemented primarily by the municipalities, while sound in principle, was perhaps overly optimistic, in practise considering that many municipalities in the Region lacked a commitment to the key concept in the plan, that being the focus of growth on the City of Edmonton. Furthermore, no special action appears to have been taken by the APB as a result of Regulation 449/81, directing that body to assist the EMRPC in addressing the growth management directives of the province (See Appendix 2).

Fourth, as a general policy document, the regional plan contains important terms and concepts which have not been defined, refined or explained in a clear, unambiguous way (for example, the concepts of urban growth and urban development). As a result, a variety of interpretations are possible, leading to confused and sometimes inconsistent use of the Plan.

Finally, there is a perceived imbalance in the application of regional plan policies such that the main impacts are borne by the rural municipalities. For example, the Fringe Area policies do not apply within urban boundaries, and the preservation of agricultural land is strongly promoted in rural municipalities, while urban municipalities are largely unconstrained in that respect. While some of this perceived inequity may be necessary in furtherance of regional objectives, it nevertheless complicates the process of gaining the full co-operation and commitment of all municipalities on regional issues.

IV. THE FRAMEWORK FOR REVIEW

The basic framework for Regional Plans in Alberta is given in the Planning Act and in 2 documents prepared by the Alberta Planning Board (i.e. the "Revised Guidelines for Regional Plan Preparation and Review" and the "Framework for the Application of Regional Plan Guidelines).

1. The Planning Act

The 1977 Planning Act required each Regional Planning Commission to prepare and adopt a regional plan. Part 3 Section 45 of the Act provides that regional plans and statutory plans "may include

(a) maps, diagrams and other graphic aids, and
(b) any written statements, policies, proposals and forecasts that are considered necessary and appropriate for the plan in which they appear."

Section 47 of the Planning Act provides a very generalized idea of what is expected of Regional Plans in Alberta. This section reads as follows:

> A regional plan
>
> (a) shall provide for the present and future land use and development of the planning region, and
>
> (b) may regulate and control the use and development of land in the planning region.

The Act goes on to describe the adoption process for Regional Plans; they must be approved by the APB and ratified by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Further, the Act states that every statutory plan, by-law, and action taken by local authorities shall be consistent with the Regional Plan. Alberta's planning legislation, unlike Ontario's, does not require the Minister to approve General Municipal Plans. Thus, the legislation envisages a planning hierarchy whereby the Regional Plan is accorded an important leadership role, a document to which municipal plans and by-laws must conform.

2. The Alberta Planning Board Guidelines

The generality of the legislation concerning Regional Plans was enlarged upon in 2 reports published in 1982 by the Alberta Planning Board, and referred to earlier. The guidelines are intended to be flexible, and are not intended to be read as cast in stone. However, the Alberta Planning Board, which is charged with reviewing and approving each Regional Plan, uses criteria expressed in the guidelines in order to evaluate the plans.

In summary, the APB guidelines state that Regional Plans should

- emphasize the key issues in the region;
- define an overall strategy by defining goals and objectives and by stating, in broad terms, how the plan's policies are expected to achieve these;
- establish a growth management framework through consultation with the municipalities and Provincial agencies;

- develop policy on a number of relevant areas. Policy areas suggested include:

  A. Management of Growth and Change
  B. Development Within Urban Municipalities
  C. Urban Fringe
  D. Agriculture
  E. Residential Development in Agricultural Areas
  F. Country Residential
  G. Hamlets
  H. Rural Industrial
  I. Environment
  J. Resource Utilization
  K. Transportation, Utilities and Services

- ensure that policies do not preempt the responsibilities of local authorities, and that they comply with Provincial polices;

- give special consideration to policy areas dealing with the delivery of hard services such as transportation, environment and utilities;

- contain broader long-term policy statements which will provide a framework for municipal implementation measures;

- refrain from giving detailed information on implementation as this is to be left to the other statutory instruments defined by the Act - GMPs, land use by-laws etc., and to the Regional Planning Commission through its subdivision approval authority;

- state what the arrangements are for policy implementation and co-ordination;

- concentrate on issues which, generally speaking, are related to land use; and

- be primarily a policy rather than a detailed regulatory document.

In addition to the above points, the Board provides some fairly detailed instructions regarding how the Regional Plans are to deal with the policy areas identified above.

From a Commission staff perspective, the Board's guidelines, if taken at face value, are reasonable, although impractical as far as implementation is concerned. However, despite being prepared using the guidelines, the current Regional Plan experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining approval because of the Board's interpretation of them. This was based on a set of circumstances which evolved in the Region in the wake of the 1981 Edmonton annexation decision, and which caused the Board to insist on the approval of a Regional

Plan which has proved difficult to implement. Circumstances have changed considerably in the Province and the Edmonton Region since the early eighties, and recent developments and decisions would indicate that the Board's guidelines may be interpreted differently when a revised plan is reviewed for approval, than was the case in the 1982 to 1984 period.

3. The Commission's Vision of the Region

In June, 1991, the Commission assisted the review of the 1984 Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan with its first-ever Futures Workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to unite the Commission members around a long term vision of the Region which could be used as a basis for determining the types of action needed to carry that vision into reality. The Vision was not to be constrained by any particular views of what regional planning is or is not, nor by what the Regional Planning Commission can or cannot do under its mandate.

Consequently the Vision statement addresses a number of topics of everyday familiarity to regional planning--agriculture, the environment, various land uses--as well as some not traditionally part of the domain of regional planning, such as telecommunications, education and personal development, health and social services. Others noted are clearly connected with regional planning, but the Region's role and mandate, if any, have never been clearly articulated--economic development and transportation and utilities, for example.

The view of the Region which the workshop participants share is one of a "well community", that emerges through the co-operative and co-ordinated handling of many aspects of growth and development (land use, urban growth, urban sprawl, economic development, agricultural land use, green areas, sensitive environments, utilities, transportation). The interconnectedness of these is recognized, and the dominant theme of the VISION is one of a partnership in action, of the Region, the Province and the Municipalities working together, of improved co-ordination of decision making in key areas.

Interestingly, with a couple of notable exceptions, the goals and principles of the Growth Management Framework of the existing plan have been re-affirmed in the Commission's vision statement. The vision statement does not explicitly recognize the dominance of the City of Edmonton, nor does it make any specific reference to affordability of housing. On the other hand, the vision statement places a great deal of emphasis on cooperative, coordinated approaches to regional issues, with the EMRPC playing a significant leadership and facilitative role. A stronger emphasis on actually implementing the principles and policies is suggested in the Vision.

The purpose of the Vision statement is to create a shared view of the key features of the Region the Commission desires for the next and succeeding generations. The purpose of the Regional Plan, as the primary instrument through which the EMRPC does its business, is to facilitate or direct decision-making, such that the shared vision begins, and continues, to emerge.

The Vision speaks to "a strong regional plan that would unite governments around these issues, while respecting the uniqueness and autonomy of each participating municipality and community." Working persistently to achieve that Vision of the Region suggests the need for a comprehensive, integrated and implementable system for managing the Region's growth. This question will be addressed further in the forthcoming discussion paper on Growth Management.

In addition, the Regional Plan review program includes the preparation of nearly a dozen discussion papers on other topics. In each, it is proposed to extract pertinent parts of the Vision Statement and to examine various options for bringing those aspects of the Vision forth into reality.

4. Factors Influencing The Current Plan Review

Unlike the situation during the 1970s and early 1980s when the current plan was being prepared, the Region does not presently face the pressures of dealing with very rapid population and economic growth. Rather, public funds are limited, governments are being directed (by the electorate, the ratepayers, or other levels of government) to practise restraint, and more issues are considered in need of solutions that cannot be implemented by individual municipalities. These factors are considered below.

(a) Government Funding and Spending

A number of factors are present in the government finance environment which have important implications for planning. At the same time, high unemployment and reduced oil and gas activity results in lower revenues being generated. As a result, the provincial government has reduced its share of funding to municipalities, and has cut grants in various infrastructure programs (for example, in two years, a 43 percent reduction in the Basic Capital Component of the Alberta Cities Transportation Partnership Program). While the government grant component of municipal government budgets is being threatened, taxpayers are demanding that their local governments keep tax increases to a minimum. In some instances, ratepayers are becoming organized, scrutinizing budget item for places to trim and/or refusing to pay more.

Consequently, municipal governments are being squeezed between senior governments and their tax payers. Furthermore, the prevailing structure of municipal government finance, relying as it does on property assessment for revenue, means that the desire for increased assessment is an important factor in many land use decisions, especially at the local level. This results in competition between municipalities, sometimes leading to fierce and costly inter-municipal disputes. Increasingly, inter-municipal disputes over the entitlement to property tax revenues surface as a controversial issue in annexation proceedings, and revenue sharing arrangements are being ordered on an ad hoc basis. With the temptation to "plan by assessment", it is easy to lose sight of other, less tangible goals

and principles such as those advanced in the Regional Plan. It is essential that local government spending reflect a logical, well planned set of public priorities, that the means be found to provide the most service at the lowest possible cost, and that expensive duplication be avoided.

The present Regional Plan contains objectives for financially strong communities in its references to strengthening local self-sufficiency in the provision of public services and strengthening the non-residential components of the municipal tax base. The former was not intended as an expression of support for down-loading of the burden of service delivery from senior governments; the latter was intended to encourage a well-balanced distribution of the property tax burden across residential and non-residential properties and to avoid excessive tax burdens on the homeowner.

Despite these regional plan objectives Commission staff have not conducted any recent, systematic research to monitor the many financial and taxation related matters that affect land use and development in the communities of our Region. It would be useful to have information on the funding and spending profiles of the region's municipalities, both in absolute and relative terms, over a time period spanning several years. Also of interest will be the results of the Government's review of municipal government finance, presently underway.

(b) Co-ordinated and Co-operative Decision-Making

The recently released "Summary of a New Economic Development Strategy for Edmonton" identifies as a limitation the "lack of a sense of a greater Edmonton region, working together for common benefit" (p. 17). A critical issue to be faced, the report states, is the difficulty in co-ordinating nineteen regional municipalities. Further, the report names no less than fifteen existing economic organizations active in Edmonton and the region. This begs the question of who is in charge, who has the big picture clearly in view? Not surprisingly, a key feature of the implementation of the economic development strategy is a merger of certain existing organizations.

Many agencies are involved in the development of the Region. Their actions and decisions are not fully co-ordinated. Land use planning is, in some respects, beset with a problem not unlike the economic development situation whereby many decision-makers operate in the absence of the overall big picture. One important example is in the provision of regional water and sewer services. Regional Services Commissions are each created by separate Order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council pursuant to the Regional Municipal Services Act, primarily in response to a request from the local jurisdiction, and on the basis of a feasibility study. The Commissions are eligible for provincial grants which are administered by Alberta Transportation and Utilities, and Alberta Environment is

responsible for licensing the construction of new water and sewer lines. The Commissions operate on a full cost recovery basis and each Regional Services Commission sets its own rates (approved by the PUB) and operating policies. In the case of water services, the Commissions purchase treated water through agreements with the City of Edmonton. It is understood that the Commissions may not limit the growth of communities by withholding services. In one case, the service is to be provided by a private sector company under contract with the Regional Service Commission.

The location, sizing and timing of infrastructure has long been recognized for its important role in determining urban growth patterns. The present regional plan contains a growth management framework, created largely by the Government of Alberta. The Alberta Planning Board has been charged with the responsibility of assisting the E.M.R.P.C. to implement the framework's principles. Yet, regional services are being extended incrementally throughout the Region and beyond, with no apparent consideration being given to the potential impacts of such decisions on regional growth patterns, or of the need for a broad level of policy to ensure that servicing decisions are synchronized with land use plans.

(c) A Regional Perspective

Increasingly, municipalities are recognizing that more can be achieved in partnership with other municipalities, or by participating in effective regional bodies, than by solitary independent action. This perception is apparent if one considers water and sewer commissions, recreation, economic development and solid waste management; in some areas, regional approaches have advanced further than in others, and have been more successful than others.

Despite its legislative mandate, regional planning has gone through, and is still experiencing, an identity crisis, having swung from a highly regulatory approach which intruded significantly--in some cases--on local decision-making, to a near total emphasis on non-regulatory advisory approaches. The early emphasis on regional level control was necessary during the times before General Municipal Plans and Land Use By-laws had been prepared by municipalities. However, neither of these extreme approaches appear acceptable or adequate to meet the needs of the Region in the future.

There remains a widely held perception that supporting effective decision-making and authority at the regional level necessarily means a loss of local decision-making powers. Rather, what is needed is a recognition that local and regional decision-making can operate most effectively in tandem, that some issues need to be handled at a level removed from the locality. Indeed, the absence of clear, overall provincial policy is often identified as a weakness in effective lower level decision-making. Thus, an effective

partnership really would require active participation at provincial, regional and municipal levels.

V. IMPLEMENTING REGIONAL PLANNING

Several different, but overlapping approaches can be used to implement regional planning and regional plans. No one approach will be sufficient for all situations; most of these will be used at different times, on different topics and with different degrees of emphasis. They include the role[2] of:

(a) Policy researcher, whereby research is undertaken on topical land use and related questions on an ongoing basis with the aim of developing and refining regional policy, or assisting with the development of local policy.

(b) Information Officer, whereby key data, possibly in GIS format, are assembled, organized and distributed or communicated to prospective users, and maintained in support of internal research functions.

(c) Facilitator, whereby the Commission undertakes to find ways and means of easing the planning and development process for municipalities, the private sector, and the public and special interest groups (e.g. enhancing understanding of the planning process; getting issues onto the table; monitoring and communicating public priorities; etc.) in pursuit of regional interests.

(d) Intervenor, whereby the Commission through policy and/or third party involvement, seeks to influence the actions and decisions of others, whether higher or lower in the planning hierarchy. This may occur through policy which influences the decisions of other bodies, through participation in formal hearing processes on relevant topics, or through conducting and following up on conformity reviews of statutory plans and by-laws.

(e) Advocate, whereby the Commission develops a political position on topical land use and related questions, and speaks in support of this position to senior governments, local authorities, and other agencies.

(f) Regulator, whereby some land use and related decisions are governed by the Commission. For example, the Commission's role as an SAA is considered to be regulatory.

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[2]These are based upon work prepared by Clayton Research Associates/City Spaces Consulting for the Greater Vancouver Regional District, 1990.

The role of advocate is one which has been little used, but which has a high degree of potential, given that the Commission members represent a third of the province's population. Its potential for use would depend on achieving a true partnership in the Region, with broad support for basic principles and ways of achieving them. Lip service to co-operation is not sufficient; municipalities must trust each other and the Commission to act in the interest of the regional public.

The regulator role is closely represented by the land use by-law system and related development agreements and is predominantly a municipal function, although some regional policy (e.g. subdivision of better agricultural land) may be highly regulatory in nature.

In staff opinion, the first four roles (policy researcher, information officer, facilitator and intervenor) are critical, and the primary ones for the Commission to pursue in carrying out regional planning functions.

The extent to which one role or approach is preferred over the others will depend on the nature of the subject vis-a-vis the Commission's mandate and the state of the art (for example, is more research or information needed on a particular question?). One approach cannot be recommended for all situations.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the foregoing, a number of conclusions can be reached regarding the type of Regional Plan required to meet the future needs of the Metropolitan Region. These are as follows:

1. The Plan should be based on the current ABP guidelines which offer a wide range of latitude in how the Commission prepares its regional plan. The only exception to this should be with regard to implementation (see Conclusion 5).

2. The issues addressed in the Plan should broadly follow those suggested in the Board's guidelines or otherwise deal with issues which possess the following characteristics, or pertain to one or more of the following topics:

   (a) an issue which affects more than one municipality (e.g. urban growth, country residential growth, air pollution, waste management, heavy industrial development);

   (b) a resource which is non-renewable and of widespread significance (e.g. good agricultural land, energy resources, sand and gravel);

   (c) a facility or resource which crosses jurisdictional boundaries (e.g. rivers, lakes, railways, roads, pipelines, transmission lines, trails);

   (d) a resource which may be more important to an adjacent municipality than to the "host" municipality (e.g. recreation and open space lands); and

(e) an area in which the cumulative effects of many local decisions are deemed to have a regional interest or impact.

3. The Plan should identify where regional interests lie and should develop goals, objectives, and policies to further those interests.

4. The Plan should create a vehicle for co-ordinating growth in the Region. As such it should attempt to generate an overall picture of the region which municipalities, regional servicing agencies and Provincial departments can use to integrate and co-ordinate their actions and capital spending priorities with land use policy.

5. The Plan should develop additional means for the Commission to implement the Regional Plan besides subdivision approval and conformity review of municipal plans and land use by-laws. Other means of implementation include any or all of the approaches mentioned in Part V as well as the formation of new partnerships and associations with implementing agencies. In other words the Plan must foster, and put into action, a new spirit of co-operation. This will require attention, at all times, to those issues and areas where urban/rural inequities are perceived, and an assessment of whether they can be resolved or are reasonable in achieving overall regional goals and objectives.

APPENDIX 1: THE EVOLUTION OF REGIONAL PLANS

1. Introduction

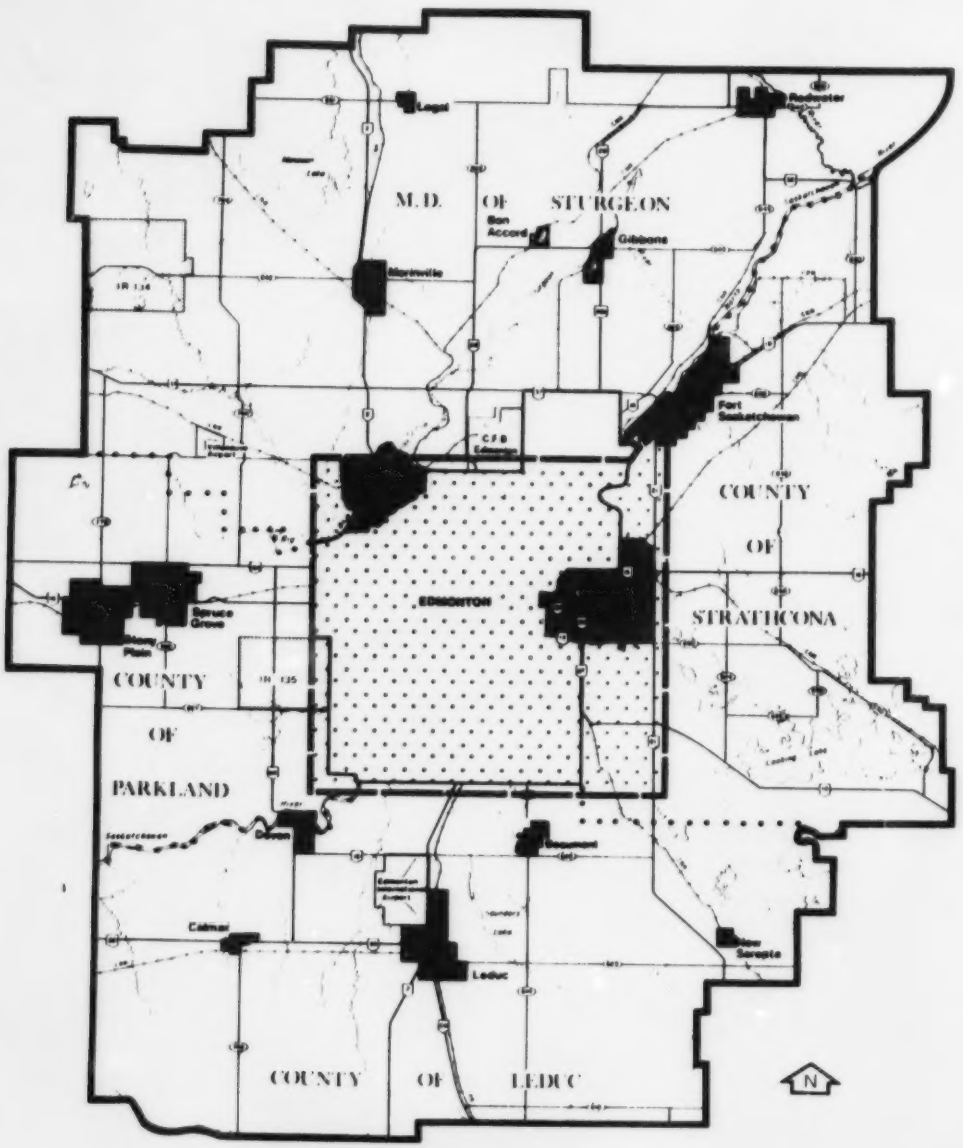
The Edmonton Regional Plan - Metropolitan Part was originally adopted in January, 1958. Over its 26 year life span, several consolidations were produced, the last one in 1982. As suggested by its name, the Plan encompassed only a portion of the region, extending two miles south of the current south boundary of Edmonton, one mile east of Highway 21, and one mile west of Edmonton though the Stony Plain Indian Reserve. To the north, most of St. Albert was included, as was part of Fort Saskatchewan. Much of the northeast area, annexed to Edmonton in January, 1982 was excluded. The boundary of the Metro Part Plan is shown on Map 1, in relation to the current E.M.R.P.C. Region. Interestingly, the first regional plan covered an area not much larger in size than the current City of Edmonton. Outside the Metro Part boundary, no regional plan was in effect until 1984.

The Metropolitan Part Plan was comprised of a brief text, in three parts, and an accompanying map. Parts 1 and III set out a number of general provisions and the amendment and appeal procedures respectively; the contents of these parts referred primarily to relevant sections of the provincial legislation. The business part of the plan, so to speak, was entitled Part II - Zones (Land Use Classes): General Purposes, Permitted Uses and Site Requirements. These aspects of land use were addressed for the following land use classes: General Urban; Agricultural - General Urban Reserve; General Industrial; Agricultural - General Industrial Reserve; Metropolitan Recreation; County Residence "A" and "B"; and Low Density Agricultural, all of which had a corresponding designation on the land use map. In addition, regulations were set out for "Special Uses", [including Mobile Home Courts, Airport (also shown on the Map), Airport Related Zones, Highway Commercial Development (for which a separate plan was prepared) and Sanitary and Modified Sanitary Landfill Sites]," Non-conforming Uses and Buildings", and Other Regulations.

The description of the Regional Plan - Metropolitan Part is more akin to our present understanding of land use by-laws, and indeed the plan operated as such. Any proposed land use which did not fall among the permitted or conditional uses required an amendment to the Regional Plan. Not surprisingly, the Plan was amended several hundred times during its life time. In some instances, the subject area amounted to only a few acres; in others, whole sections of land were involved. In all cases, the Plan played a very strong, regulatory role in controlling land use in the inner core of the Region.

2. The Transitional Period - 1977 to 1984

In 1977, a new Planning Act was introduced which required municipalities above particular size limits to adopt a General Municipal Plan; all municipalities were required to put in place a Land Use By-law. In the meantime, the Regional Planning Commission had embarked on a comprehensive process of preparing a regional plan for the entire Planning Region. Part of this process included the Edmonton Region Growth Studies, a major and thorough investigation of urban growth and settlement processes, the intent of which was to develop the urban settlement policy component of the Regional Plan.



Map 1
REGIONAL PLAN BOUNDARIES

Regional Plan – Metropolitan Part Plan Area

Current Regional Plan Boundary

Rural Municipal Boundary

EDMONTON METROPOLITAN REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION

Although a comprehensive draft regional plan was released in 1979, both this plan and the Edmonton Region Growth Studies were caught in the midst of a major annexation application filed by the City of Edmonton.

The application sought to annex large tracts of undeveloped land, and to dissolve the County of Strathcona by annexing tax generating industrial areas and Sherwood Park, a hamlet despite having a population in excess of 25,000. Rural parts of the County, more remote from Edmonton, were to be given to two existing rural municipalities. The City of St. Albert was also to be incorporated into Edmonton, as had been done two decades earlier with the Towns of Beverly and Jasper Place. Thus, the annexation application represented as much a proposal to restructure local government in the region as to adjust Edmonton's boundary to correct a land supply deficiency.

The decision of the Government of Alberta, released in 1981, contained a number of provisions:

(a) the City of Edmonton boundary would double in size to address the land supply problem;

(b) the autonomy of St. Albert and the County of Strathcona would be protected, as it was the view of the Government that "the needs and aspirations of the people of Edmonton and [the] region are best served by a number of local municipal governments working together co-operatively, but maintaining their individual autonomy." However, both St. Albert and Sherwood Park had maximum population limits set at 70,000;

(c) there would be created a new Edmonton Metropolitan Planning Region which would be much smaller than the region then in existence and on which the representation of the City of Edmonton would increase form one-seventh to one-third (9 of 27). The Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission thus created was "required to develop a regional plan which ensures that Edmonton City will continue to maintain approximately 75 percent of the Metropolitan Region's population, while all other communities, including Sherwood Park and St. Albert, in the new planing region will accommodate 25 percent of the Region's population"; and

(d) there would be established a new regional municipal services act which would "provide for regional authorities with the necessary powers to own and operate regional facilities, such as water and sewage treatment plants, associated pipelines, and solid waste disposal sites."

The new EMRPC came into existence on January 1, 1982. In addition to the usual requirements for RPCs to prepare a regional plan, the EMRPC was faced with the task of incorporating the growth management directives of the Province for the Region into its plan. The City of Edmonton was the only supporter of the 75:25 principle; all other municipalities were strongly opposed to it. In 1984, when the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan was adopted, the growth management framework for the plan reflected, almost verbatim, the principles of the provincial government. No further refinement

could be agreed upon and Edmonton (and probably the APB) would settle for nothing less. No special legislative or other authority was granted to the EMRPC to implement the provisions, although a regulation was passed requiring the APB to advise and assist the Commission in incorporating the principles into the regional plan (Appendix 2).

During this transitional period, an important function of the APB was to advise RPCs on the preparation of their regional plans, particularly with respect to provincial policy and meeting the requirements of the Planning Act. Before coming into effect, the regional plan must be adopted by the Commission, approved by the Board and ratified by the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

It is important to distinguish the APB's pre-annexation advice from its post-annexation advice. A draft regional plan had been completed by the Commission and was released to the public and referred to the APB for comment in March, 1979. The Board responded (1980a: 5) with the following comments:

> "The major conclusion of the analysis presented in this report is that the Board supports the plan in general terms and wishes to commend the Commission and its staff on the completeness and thoroughness of the draft plan document."

The pre-annexation growth strategy envisioned a city centred region with a hierarchy of smaller communities each performing a broadly defined role. In particular reference to the strategic orientation of the plan, the board suggested that the derivation of the strategy was not made sufficiently clear in the plan. Some demonstration was required of how the strategy would result in economical and beneficial development. Its implications for servicing and for the structures of regional planning and government needed clarification and elaboration. So also did the measures for its implementation (the main one proposed was a detailed land use classification map) and the methods of monitoring its success or failure, required further explanation. However, the Board also commented:

> "...if the strategy is a reflection of political reality, or public opinion, or is the most rational planning strategy, then that should be made evident. Which of these applies will determine the sort of problems which can be expected to arise in implementing the strategy, and therefore has important implications in judging the plan's viability" (APB, 1980a: 12).

The Board's comments were based upon the following plan approval criteria, contained in a report titled "Guidelines for Regional Plan Review" (1980).

4.2 Criteria

In this context, the following are the Board's plan approval criteria:

4.2.1 That the regional plan sets out an orientation which clearly indicates how the plan is to meet all formal requirements of the Act. ie. that the proposed pattern of development will be orderly and economical; that the plan will take steps to improve the quality of life; and that the policies do not unduly affect individual rights or municipal autonomy;

4.2.2 That a clearly articulated plan strategy describe how growth and development is to be accommodated through a preferred pattern of development and how the relevant key regional issues are to be addressed by the commission;

4.2.3 That the regional policies adequately reflect Provincial and municipal policy in relevant areas;

4.2.4 That the regional policies are not in conflict with Provincial policy;

4.2.5 That there are adequate proposals to meet the needs for co-ordination between the regional planning commission, the Provincial Government, and local authorities and boards;

4.2.6 That the plan is internally consistent insofar as inter-related policies are mutually compatible and the policies generally are consistent with the goals and objectives of the plan;

4.2.7 That the policies are adequately supported by reasoned justification for their adoption;

4.2.8 That suitable proposals are made for the plan's implementation commensurate with available resources, and that it provides an adequate basis for the preparation of General Municipal Plans and related statutory documents, e.g. Area Structure Plans Area Redevelopment Plans and Land Use By-laws; and

4.2.9 That suitable arrangements are proposed for plan monitoring and review in order to maintain its relevance through time. (pp. 19-21)

The timing was such that the 1979 plan had been prepared without the benefit of the Board's approval criteria. Nonetheless, the criteria were sound and reasonable and implied that regional plans would be comprehensive and would play a strong, deliberate and influential role in regional growth management issues. This would have to be so, were the Regional Planning Commission to address all of the comments suggested by the Board.

Overall, the APB was supportive of the 1979 draft plan and, in its letter of transmittal, encouraged "all participants in the planning and development process to support it and to adhere to its policy guidance". However, this draft plan was caught in the midst of the Edmonton annexation dispute and was subsequently recast to take into account the changing political mood of heightened sensitivity to growth issues and the decision of the Cabinet on the annexation.

In December, 1982, a Proposed Regional Plan was completed for the area encompassed by the new planning commission boundary; this plan incorporated the principles of the Cabinet annexation decision described previously. In the meantime, two additional reports had been released by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, through the APB: "Revised Guidelines for Regional Plan Preparation and Review" in March, 1982 and "Framework for Application of Regional Plan Guidelines" the following month.

These documents superseded the 1980 report and were exhaustive in providing further interpretation of the rather general provisions of the Planning Act pertaining to the content of regional plans. The Plan Approval Criteria, stated earlier were retained in the 1982 document, albeit in a slightly modified form. Under the "Revised Guidelines", these sections of the Act providing for the preparation of Regional Plans, were taken to mean that "regional plans are intended to serve as general policy documents dealing with issues truly regional in their significance and relying primarily upon the exercise of municipal planning prerogatives for their implementation" (APB, 1982a: Minister's Letter of Transmittal).

The Letter of Transmittal to the "Framework" document (APB, 1982b) contained the following statements:

> "The framework document is intended to serve as an outline specification illustrating the application of the guidelines in the preparation of regional plans. While not exhaustive in its treatment of regional plan content, the framework is intended to provide a reliable indication of the Provincial Government's expectations in terms of the key elements to be addressed in regional plans."

The truth of the above statement was borne out in practice. The APB refused to approve a regional plan for the EMRPC that did not comply strictly with the guidelines and framework, notwithstanding the wide latitude granted in the Planning Act as to the formulation of regional plans.

According to the "Framework" document, the proper means of dealing with the growth and change elements in the region was for the plan to establish a policy framework encouraging growth to broad classes of location. It was "not considered acceptable for a regional plan to allocate growth to specified locations, in a detailed fashion, through a regulatory approach" (APB, 1982b: 4). The regional plan was to give guidance to municipalities on planning measures which would give effect to the growth management policies. Maps in the regional plan were to be used only as a guiding tool, assisting the municipalities in developing their plans and not as a land use control mechanism. No explanation was forthcoming as to how the Commission was to ensure the implementation of the 75:25 principle, following this approach.

After a long and arduous "negotiation" process, the Commission finally followed the directives for the APB in preparing its Regional Plan. A major shift in provincial philosophy between 1979 and 1982, but one not reflected in any changes to the statutes, led finally to the ratification of a very general, advisory and non-prescriptive regional plan.

3. The Current (1984) Regional Plan

The 1984 Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Plan is a general policy plan accompanied by a Policy Reference Map. As a basis for the policies, the plan contains eight goal statements and a growth management framework. The goals address the four broad areas of regional growth management, resource management, natural environment and transportation and utilities. The basic principles of the growth management framework of the plan emerged from the Alberta Cabinet decision respecting a major Edmonton annexation proposal about a decade ago. The Commission was directed to incorporate those principles into the regional plan.

The key features of the goals and framework of the Plan include:

- a land use and development pattern which focuses regional growth (i.e. population growth) on the City of Edmonton;
- avoidance of dispersed patterns of settlement and lesser amounts of (population) growth to be accommodated in other existing urban communities;
- conservation of better agricultural land and protection of environmentally sensitive areas;
- transportation and utility services which reinforce the city-centred region concept.

In addition, the plan goals contain references to reinforcing "regional and community identity", availability of "adequate and affordable housing...in well planned communities", all municipalities sharing in "the economic growth of the region", and "transportation and utility services which are safe, convenient, efficient and environmentally compatible."

Regional Plan policy is largely advisory and, where mandatory, tends to be of the sort that directs municipalities to undertake some action through their statutory plans or by-laws, with few or no standards set for compliance. Often, this means that a regional plan policy is simply paraphrased in a local plan, without the intended refinement, detailing, or setting of criteria, etc. Apart from the Commission's role as Subdivision Approving Authority and its influence as planning advisors to some municipalities, the main attempt at regional plan implementation has been through the review of local plans and by-laws for conformity with the provisions of Regional Plan. This has been a rather tedious and unrewarding process, sometimes time consuming, and confrontational where there are differences of opinion as to whether a local plan does or does not conform.

APPENDIX 2: ALBERTA REGULATION 449/81

THE ALBERTA GAZETTE, JANUARY 15, 1982

ALBERTA REGULATION 449/81

(Filed on December 16, 1981)

THE PLANNING ACT, 1977

(O.C. 1231/81)

Approved and Ordered,
F. LYNCH-STAUNTON,
Lieutenant Governor.

Edmonton, December 16, 1981

Upon the recommendation of the Honourable the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Lieutenant Governor in Council, pursuant to section 17(3) of The Planning Act, 1977, makes the regulation in the attached Appendix, being the Duties and Functions of the Alberta Planning Board with Respect to the Establishment of the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission Regulation.

PETER LOUGHEED (Chairman)

APPENDIX

PLANNING ACT, 1977

Duties and Functions of the Alberta Planning Board
with Respect to the Establishment of the
Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission Regulation

1 The Alberta Planning Board shall consult with and give direction to the Edmonton Regional Planning Commission and the Edmonton Metropolitan Regional Planning Commission in accordance with the "Report and Decision Concerning the Edmonton Annexation Application", June 1981.

2 The Alberta Planning Board shall consult with and give direction to the above-named Commissions referred to in Section 1 on preparation of a regional plan, including growth management strategies, in accordance with the planning principles prescribed in the document entitled "Report and Decision Concerning the Edmonton Annexation Application", June 1981, particularly having regard to the following:

(a) Maintenance of the role of the City of Edmonton as the dominant community in the metropolitan region and maintenance of the City of Edmonton as the center of the regional growth pattern in future, with approximately similar importance in terms of population distribution;

(b) Provision for continued expansion to the City of St. Albert and the hamlet of Sherwood Park to a forseeable population of up to 70,000 persons in the long-term planning horizon;

(c) Recognition of the need for the preservation of high quality agricultural land and avoidance of unduly dispersed patterns of residential, industrial and other types of human settlement through appropriate provisions in the regional plan;

(d) Provision for the accommodation of growth outside of the Cities of Edmonton and St. Albert and the hamlet of Sherwood Park to occur in the existing urban centres of Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, Morinville, Redwater, Spruce Grove, Stony Plain and Devon.

3 The Alberta Planning Board shall ensure that all Departments and agencies of the Government of Alberta shall be aware of and have regard to the principles contained in Section 2.

4 This regulation comes into force on January 1, 1982.